

I. *A Letter from Mr Wilson to the Publisher, giving an account of the Lapis Amianthus, Asbestos, or Linum incombustible, lately found in Scotland.*

Sir,

BEING sensible of the share you have in advancing the Study into the Rarities of Nature, I presume to give you the following relation of what I observed in the *Lapis Amianthus* and Incombustible Lint, which I found out in *Scotland* : Whereby perhaps there may be some light given to the searching further into the nature of its production, because the description of it, given by *Pliny* and several of the Ancient and Modern Writers of the Rarities of this Nature, seems somewhat different from this.

Having heard that in the Ground of *Francis Gordon* of *Achindore*, in the Shire of *Aberdeen*, near the *Highlands*, there were found some pieces of petrified Wood ; I had the curiosity to go to the place where they were found, about a mile from the Gentlemans House.

There on the side of a Hill of a Heath kind of Ground, somewhat inclining to what we call Moss, in a very small Brook, and hard by it, in the bounds of ten or twelve yards, I found a great many of those Stones, some a foot in length, which appeared plainly like Wood : But because I could not perceive any footstep of Wood thereabout, neither could any of them be found, except in that very spot of Ground, I could not be persuaded they were petrified Wood. Then I went to cut up the Ground about the place with my Knife, where

where I found likewise some pieces of the Stone, and very near the superficie I got several pieces of a fibrous matter, which my Knife could not cut; this I immediately judged to be an incombustible matter, as it proved afterwards when I try'd it by the Fire. And because, so far as I then remembred I had heard or read of it, I thought it had been always esteem'd certain filaments that came off the *Lapis Amianthos*, I resolv'd to observe more narrowly the production of it.

When I found some pieces of the Stones very hard in the middle, and the fibrous matter on the outides and ends, I was inclin'd to believe that the Flax came from the Stone: but then finding several pieces of the Flax so condensed and pressed together, that at first they appeared to be hard Stones, but being a little wet, the filaments were easily parted from one another. Many more I got, some less and some more condensed, into the nature of a Stone; and all of it, both that which was condensed together, and what was not, was lying about an inch within the ground, parallel with the surface so interwoven with the fibres of the Roots of the Grass, that it seem'd to me much more probable to believe, that the Lint turned into the Stone, than the Stone into the Lint: especially seeing most part of the Stones appeared so tender and brittle on the outside, that it's hard to believe how they could turn into that tough substance of Flax.

The Stones are of different sorts, some are white, the colour of the Lint, and of a very soft substance; so that they may be easily cut with a Knife without blunting it; others are much mixt with a whitish talk, but most of them are of a greyish colour, and very hard.

As for the production of the Flax, I think it's hard to determine in this place; because the greatest quantity I found of it, was lying, as I said before, about an inch at most within the ground, parallel with the superficie, interwoven with the roots of the Grass, without any

Root

Root of it self, but alike at both ends, as if it were cut with a Knife. The ground wherein it is found is of a greyish colour, about one inch or two thick, under which there is a black Earth for a foot in depth. So that I could find nothing in the places where most of it was got, that I could rationally conclude to produce it: But in some other spots I found much of a talkish Sand, and some pieces of Flax near to it; as also pieces of the Stone much whiter than the rest, and very like talk; which would incline one to believe that it was produced of it. Yet there being no appearance of any talk in the other places, where most of it was found, I can scarce conclude any thing about the production of it, but leave it to others far more capable and ingenious in the knowledge of Nature than I am.

But whatever way it is produced, tho I have not examined what has been writ and said of that *Linum* by many, yet it seems to me by what *Pliny*, *Aldrovandus*, and *Olaus Wormius* write concerning it, that this which I found in *Scotland*, is not inferiour to any they speak of, for generally they make it very short, whereas some of this I found 5, 6, 7, and some 8 inches long.

As for the making of it into Cloath, they all conclude it very hard. *Pliny* calls it *inventu rarum textu difficile propter brevitatem*. *Olaus Wormius* in his *Museum* says, *modus vero quo ex eo fiunt lina jam penitus ignoratur*. I confess indeed, it is true what *Pliny* says, yet it may be seen by the experiment I have shown, in making Yarn of it, that Cloath may be made of it also, for the difficulty is much greater in the one than the other.